

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

CATHERINE MANCUSO

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Interviewers

Joanne Betts
(signature)

(signature)

(signature)

3/22/79
(date)

Interviewee

Catherine Mancuso
(signature)

1610 Arden Place
(address)

Joliet Ill
(city & state)

3-22-79
(date)

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INTERVIEWEE: Catherine Mancuso

INTERVIEWER: Joanne Betts

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Catherine Mancuso by Joanne Betts for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Program on March 23, 1979 at 1610 Arden Place, Joliet. Do you want to tell me about when your family came here and what business your father got into when he got here?

MANCUSO: Yes, he came here in 1905.

BETTS: Yes.

MANCUSO: My mother followed I think in the following year.

BETTS: Ok.

MANCUSO: And they settled on the east side.

BETTS: Whereabouts on the east side?

MANCUSO: Richard Street area where the quarries are. They are not there anymore--something of them is there, something. One night the--an artesian spring came up at night. The men were working quarrying stones during the day, and when they got there the next morning, the whole quarry was full of water. All the machinery was under water and they couldn't work there anymore. They never re-opened it and it is now Michigan Beach. They only settled there for about three years. Yes, three years, then he worked at the stone quarries. When they moved from there he opened a grocery store on South Chicago Street.

BETTS: Ok.

MANCUSO: With all Italian products.

BETTS: Ok, and he serviced all the Italian families?

MANCUSO: Yes, and let's see. . .

BETTS: When did you go to work there?

MANCUSO: I hate to tell you that, kid. (Chuckle) Ten year old I was working in the store.

BETTS: Oh, what did you do?

MANCUSO: Well, I put--sold the lighter things. In those days they delivered groceries to their homes. We had to buy a horse and wagon and that is what we used. We had to buy a wagon and a horse to deliver groceries. Of course he had strictly all Italian products and his customers were all over you see, east side, west side and south side.

BETTS: Yes. What about the A & P store? Where did they put the first A & P store and about when?

MANCUSO: On Chicago Street. Oh gosh, it came in early but I can't remember the exact date.

BETTS: You told me it was the first store of its kind.

MANCUSO: The first A & P store in Joliet. Yes, that's right.

BETTS: Did a lot of people go there?



MANCUSO: Oh yes, people gradually kept going except those who had groceries delivered at home.

BETTS: After World War I got over on Armistice Day, you told me about a lady running down the street.

MANCUSO: After the first world war when peace came. That is vivid in my mind. She was going up and down Chicago Street in our neighborhood there waving the flag, and screaming peace! peace! The Delrose Brothers were handling newspapers and they walked down from downtown with a special--extra--announcing the war was over. Let's see you can insert that in there, that is history!

BETTS: What was your impression of Woodrow Wilson during this period? Can you recall what you thought of him?

MANCUSO: I thought he was a good President. Of course, I was young, too young to realize, but I do remember it.

BETTS: You told me your uncle was killed in World War I?

MANCUSO: My father's brother.

BETTS: How did that affect your family?

MANCUSO: Well, he was in Italy. He wasn't living here.

BETTS: Oh?

MANCUSO: He was in Italy. Well, naturally my family was sad. My father was sad--it was his only brother. There was only two of them, he was the

only brother he had left. He was lost in the war, and then I lost a brother in the war too.

BETTS: World War II?

MANCUSO: My brother, Joseph.

BETTS: Yes.

MANCUSO: Three of them went, Joe, Dominic

BETTS: This was During World War II?

MANCUSO: and Sam.

BETTS: Joe, Dominic and Sam went to World War II? Joe died.

MANCUSO: Joe was killed in the English Channel.

BETTS: Do you remember anything in particular about that war besides your brother dying?

MANCUSO: This last war you mean?

BETTS: Yes.

MANCUSO: Well, I certainly was not in favor of it.

BETTS: No?

MANCUSO: I wasn't in favor of it, but what are you going to do?

BETTS: Ok, then the depression came.

MANCUSO: It was one of the worst things that happened to this country.

People were out of work and they had to depend on charity. Actually, you know it is charity when you have to depend on someone else for your living--it is charity.

BETTS: Your father gave credit. . .

MANCUSO: Well, yes. From the very beginning he gave credit because people got paid once a month. Make a notation of that.

BETTS: People got paid once a month.

MANCUSO: Once a month. Have you got down about the cheese factory?

BETTS: No.

MANCUSO: We had a grocery store, then my father went into the cheese business until he was. . . Didn't I tell you about that tornado that struck the barn? He had his own cows, and my father's brother-in-law worked for him, and this tornado knocked down the building where the cheese was being made. It was flattened.

BETTS: With everything in it?

MANCUSO: The tornado just flattened it.

BETTS: Oh.

MANCUSO: The only thing that was saved was the boiler that heated the water. I can't remember the date though.

BETTS: Ok, what other jobs did you hold?

MANCUSO: Well, my first job was at Heggie Simplex Boiler on the east side. I worked in the office--bookkeeper. Then what else did I do besides that? Oh, I had charge of the time records of the working people. What do you call that now?

BETTS: The time sheets?

MANCUSO: Yes, time sheets.

BETTS: You worked at the Courthouse, too, didn't you?

MANCUSO: Oh yes, I worked for the democrats in the Treasury Office, yes, the Treasury Office. Mr. Work was the County Treasurer.

BETTS: So you got to make out all the tax bills.

MANCUSO: Yes, (chuckle) tax bills and what else did we do? I was posting the time, you know, the time they put in.

BETTS: How did you like that?

MANCUSO: I liked it.

BETTS: In the Tax office? (laugh)

MANCUSO: In the tax office, yes. Oh, I liked it. I grew up in business with people and I always enjoyed being with people, and I liked it because it was different than working in the grocery store. It was, of course, mostly political, but I liked it, I enjoyed it.

BETTS: When you were young what did you do for entertainment?

MANCUSO: (laugh) Played in the backyard when you could.

BETTS: Did you go to Dellwood Park or the different parks?

MANCUSO: Well, there was Bush Park. That was on the west side, I mean the east side, you know, off of McDonough Street where they play tennis.

BETTS: Oh.

MANCUSO: And they played--in those days they had a dance hall there--in the early days.

BETTS: That is off of McDonough Street?

MANCUSO: Yes.

BETTS: Down by the canal?

MANCUSO: It is not that far. They used to call it Bush Park, now it is another name. They have tennis courts. In the early days they had a dance hall, and what went through there? I forgot what streetcar it was, but they had streetcars going and coming from Chicago bringing people. That park on Collins Street--they had a dance hall there and they still had the streetcar going to Chicago and back in those days. They ran the streetcars for quite a while. They had boats on the stream to take you for a ride. I remember they had a merry-go-round and an open ballroom. There was a stream where they could fish.

BETTS: This isn't Dellwood Park is it?

MANCUSO: Yes it is, Dellwood Park.

BETTS: Well, did you go any other places?

MANCUSO: No.

BETTS: No? You didn't go to the Rialto?

MANCUSO: Oh yes, the theater. Yes, we went. Sure, I saw the Rialto go up.

BETTS: Do you want to tell me about that--different little incidents that happened?

MANCUSO: There was an article not long ago in the paper. You didn't see it, did you?

BETTS: No.

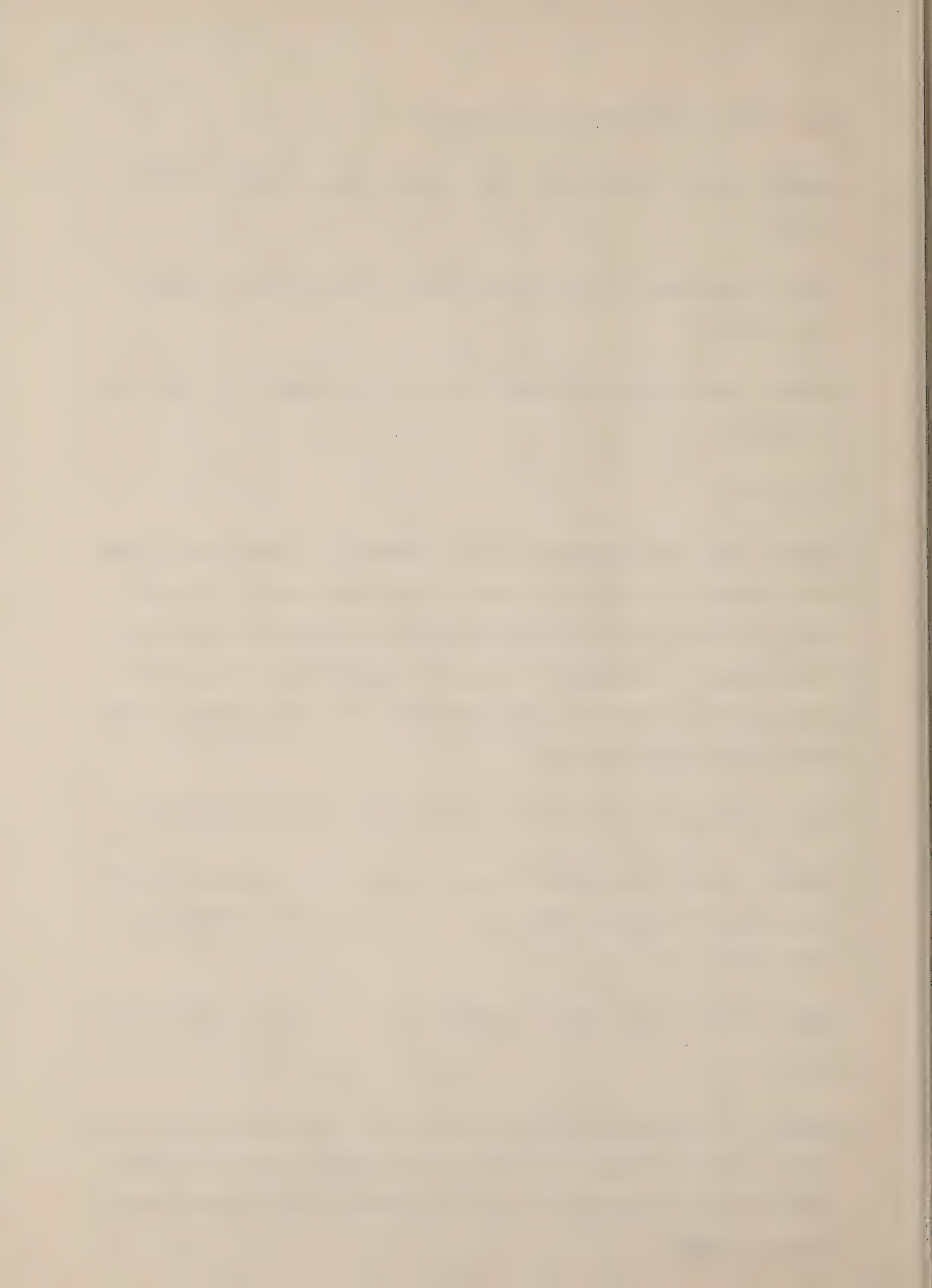
MANCUSO: See, they have been working in there now. I don't know if they have completed it. Of the many people I have known and met, they all say it is one of the most beautiful theaters in the United States--the Rialto Theater. I met people from out of town and they all say it is more beautiful than the one in New York City. It is true, because I have seen the one in New York City.

BETTS: Do you know what stuff they put in there, like the handwork?

MANCUSO: Oh well the material they used--they had to bring people out of Italy to put it together. Most of the decoration in the building was done by them.

BETTS: Yes. So during this period did you get to meet the people working on it?

MANCUSO: We did because they were brought here from Italy and they wanted Italian food, so since my father was handling Italian food, we met them when they came to the store--buy what they wanted--what they are used to eating, you know.



BETTS: You told me once about three of them that went to your store--workers, and they were looking for a place to live.

MANCUSO: Place to sleep--and you know they came where they could get sleeping quarters. Of course, there were restaurants in town. There was a building in our neighborhood that had rooms for rent and we got them for them. Of course, they didn't stay too long. They finished their job and went on.

BETTS: How long did it take them to do it?

MANCUSO: I don't remember that. Take a look on the outside. There is some fine workmanship on the outside, too.

BETTS: Do you remember the different entertainment they had at the Rialto? Could you give me an example of it?

MANCUSO: Well, in the beginning there was New Year's Eve. The Society Club would have their dance in the theater. It is a beautiful theater. It was the social crowd, you know, the big business people always had New Year's Eve at the Rialto.

BETTS: Can you remember the band leaders who came to this area?

MANCUSO: Guy Lombardo. I danced to his music at Plainfield. They had an outside dance.

BETTS: Yes. Where did you go to high school?

MANCUSO: I didn't go to high school.

BETTS: You didn't go to high school?

MANCUSO: I went to business college. Metropolitan Business College, we had in Joliet. People came from surrounding areas to go there, down south, and some of the girls would stay with people, and do much house work to pay for their board. A lot of them were placed in Joliet and a lot of them were placed in Chicago, depending on what the demand was--but that was quite a thing. This is another thing, a lot of the vets that came back from the first World War went to the Metropolitan Business College and studied business.

BETTS: Where was it located?

MANCUSO: Downtown. It was across from where the Rialto Theater is on Chicago Street. It was a building across from the theater.

BETTS: Yes.

MANCUSO: A lot of veterans got educated in the business part of life and got jobs as insurance men. The school would place you, most of the time.

BETTS: So that is where you learned all of your bookkeeping?

MANCUSO: Yes.

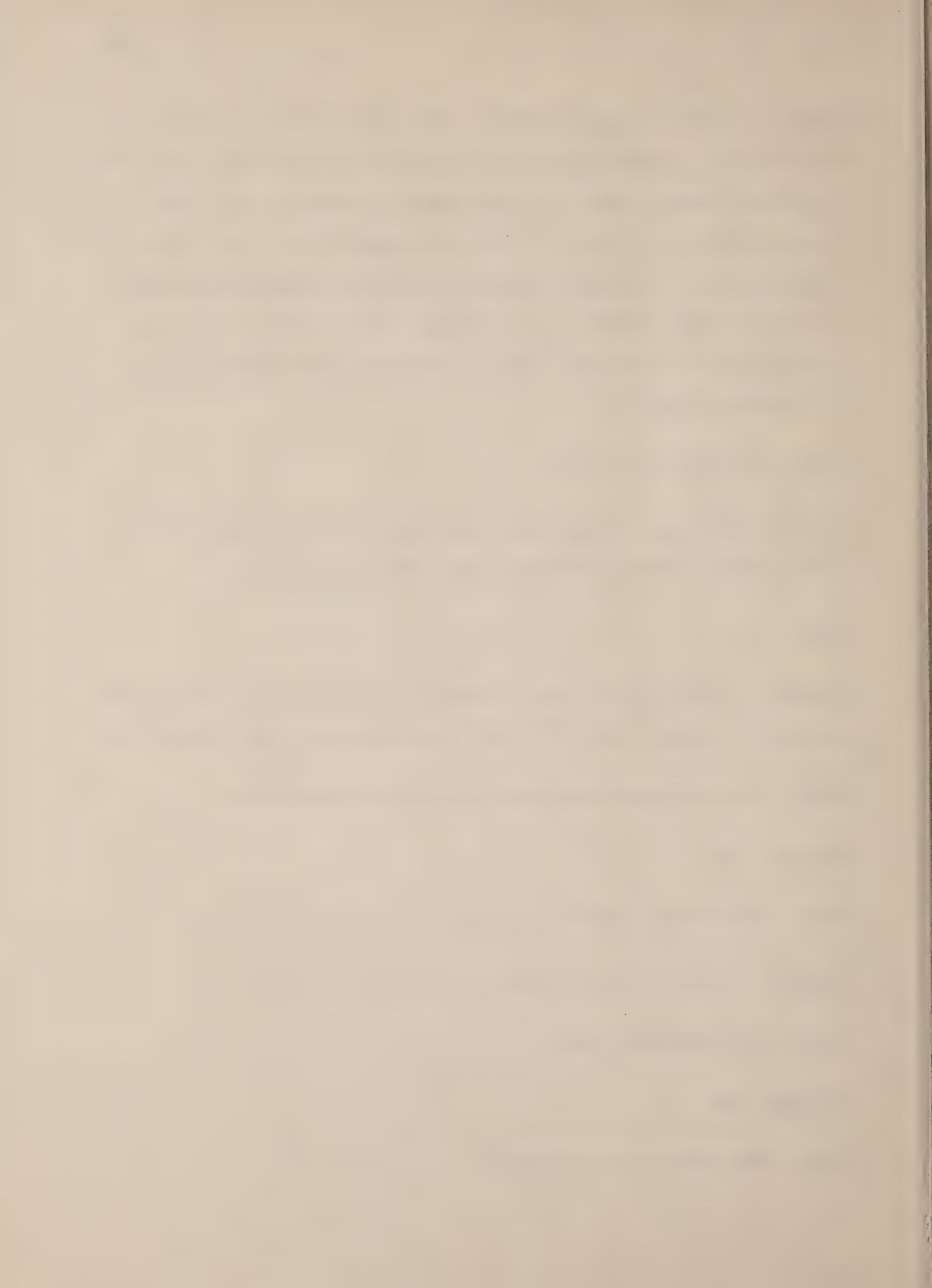
BETTS: Let me see, when did you go back to work in the grocery?

MANCUSO: I went back in the cheese factory during the war.

BETTS: The second World War?

MANCUSO: Yes.

BETTS: Why did you have to go back?



MANCUSO: My three brothers were drafted. Sam, Dominic, and Joe were drafted and one never came back. He was killed in the English Channel.

BETTS: Yes, what did you do?

MANCUSO: Sold groceries and delivered them. Sold cheese and delivered it. At that time we had the grocery store, but we didn't spend that much time with it. We devoted most of our time to the cheese business.

BETTS: Do you remember your first car?

MANCUSO: Yes.

BETTS: When was it around?

MANCUSO: During the war, was it during the war? I don't know, I can't remember if I took my brothers car or how it was.

BETTS: Well, I remember you told me you delivered cheese up in Chicago.

MANCUSO: During the war, yes, I delivered cheese up in Chicago in order to keep the customers.

BETTS: Yes.

MANCUSO: We curtailed our amount of production. We curtailed that because we just couldn't cover that area. We didn't have enough help and we just took a certain amount we could handle and that was it. We turned a lot of our customers to other cheesemakers who were friends of ours.

BETTS: Yes.

MANCUSO: But during the war I carried and delivered cheese to Chicago and surrounding areas, and I also worked in the plant too, filling containers with cheese.

BETTS: You still had the grocery store during the depression didn't you?

MANCUSO: Yes we did, we kept it, we held on to it. Then what little there was of it, we gave up. It is hard to remember the time that we gave it up. I think we had it up to 1920--it was later than that. We kept it till after the war and then we closed it and devoted our time to the cheese business. We increased our capacity in the cheese business when Micky and Sam came back.

BETTS: Well, I want to say thank you for the interview and for your cooperation.

MANCUSO: You're welcome dear.

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